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# BAHASTRA

**Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa dan Sastra**

- ❑ **Developing Soft Skills Through the Jigsaw Learning Model**  
R. Muhammad Ali
- ❑ **Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan dalam Perspektif Penulis Novel Laki-laki:  
Sebuah Kajian Feminis Novel *Ca Bau Kan* Karya Remy Sylado**  
Azwar Abbas
- ❑ **Manajemen Pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia  
(Tinjauan Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia di SMK RSBI)**  
Mulyono
- ❑ **The Importance of Theory in Academic Research**  
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Sebagai Bahasa Asing di SMA**  
Sumardi
- ❑ **Sastra dalam Konstelasi Pendidikan Karakter**  
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- ❑ **Pendidikan Sastra Berorientasi Pada Kompetensi Bersastra:  
Mencari Format Pembelajaran Sastra yang Inovatif**  
Ali Imron Al-Ma'ruf

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## EDITORIAL

Bahastra Volume XXVI Nomor 2 Edisi Maret 2012 ini terbit dengan format sedikit berbeda dari format sebelumnya. Perubahan ini dilakukan sebagai salah satu upaya menuju Bahastra yang terakreditasi. Edisi ini menampilkan tujuh tulisan ilmiah mencakup bidang Pengajaran Bahasa dan Sastra.

Artikel pertama ditulis oleh Muhammad Ali, mengulas model pembelajaran kooperatif yang dikenal dengan nama *Jigsaw*. Model pembelajaran kooperatif merupakan sebuah model pembelajaran yang sedang banyak mendapat perhatian karena dianggap sebagai model yang lebih berpusat pada siswa. Model *Jigsaw* ini dapat diterapkan dalam beberapa kelas termasuk di kelas bahasa. Dengan model *Jigsaw* ini mahasiswa akan belajar tidak hanya materi tetapi juga *soft-skills*. Sementara itu Mulyono menyorot pembelajaran bahasa dari sisi manajemen. Semakin berkualitas manajemen pembelajaran di kelas, dapat diharapkan kualitas hasil belajar siswa akan semakin meningkat. Masih tentang pembelajaran bahasa Sumardi menulis tentang Implikasi pendekatan Andragonis dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di SMA. Pendekatan ini menekankan pentingnya kerjasama guru dengan siswa dalam memutuskan kegiatan pembelajaran yang bermakna. Dengan cara ini siswa akan menjadi lebih aktif berpartisipasi dalam proses pembelajaran sehingga diharapkan akan diperoleh hasil pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang lebih baik.

Selain tiga tulisan yang membahas pengajaran bahasa, empat artikel dalam Bahastra edisi ini membahas tentang sastra. Azwar Abbas meneliti novel *Ca Bau Kan* karya Remy Sylado. Penelitian ini mengungkap kekerasan terhadap perempuan dari perspektif penulis novel laki-laki. Perempuan korban kekerasan sangat menderita, tetapi ungkapan yang mengandung semangat hidup dan kelembutan dapat membantu korban kekerasan untuk pulih dari penderitaan. Artikel berikutnya ditulis oleh Ida Puspita yang menentang pendapat bahwa teori bukanlah sesuatu yang penting dalam sebuah riset. Perkembangan dalam paradigma penelitian telah menunjukkan beberapa perspektif tentang peran teori dalam sebuah riset. Tulisan ini mengungkapkan bahwa teori berfungsi seperti otak manusia. Karena itu teori merupakan bagian yang sangat penting dari semua riset. Tulisan ini terutama mengungkapkan pentingnya teori dalam kajian sastra. Prima Gusti Yanti menulis tentang sastra dalam kaitannya dengan pendidikan karakter. Di era sekarang ini, di mana anutan yang baik sulit didapat dari petinggi, pendidikan menjadi tumpuan untuk pembinaan karakter siswa. Salah satu bahan pelajaran yang bisa digunakan untuk memberikan pengajaran karakter kepada siswa adalah karya sastra. Artikel terakhir pada Bahastra edisi ini adalah tulisan Ali Imran Al-Ma'ruf yang diawali dari keprihatinan terhadap kondisi pembelajaran sastra di sekolah selama ini. Semuanya berakar pada kompetensi guru sastra Indonesia yang tidak paham sastra atau tidak memiliki kompetensi bersastra. Melalui tulisan ini penulis menawarkan sebuah format pembelajaran sastra yang inovatif yaitu pendidikan sastra yang berorientasi pada kompetensi bersastra. Strategi dan langkah-langkah dalam pembelajaran sastra yang berorientasi pada kompetensi bersastra diuraikan secara rinci dalam ulasan ini.

Demikian ringkasan dari artikel yang kami muat dalam terbitan ini. Selamat membaca dan menikmati. Semoga memberikan manfaat bagi kita semua yang bergerak di bidang pendidikan bahasa dan sastra.

Editor

# The Importance of Theory in Academic Research

**Ida Puspita**

Lecturer of English Education Study Program

Faculty of Teacher Training and Education

Ahmad Dahlan University Yogyakarta

*Alamat Kontak: Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*

*Universitas Ahmad Dahlan Yogyakarta Jln.Pramuka 42 Yogyakarta 55162*

## Abstract

This paper is aimed to challenge the view that sees theory as something inessential in a research. The polemic of whether or not theory is important in an academic research, to some extent, is influenced by the domination of positivist research tradition. This tradition assumes that a theory is useful only if it can generate testable hypotheses. Yet, this idea rarely works in social sciences and humanities. The development of research paradigm has opened up various perspectives in seeing the role of theory in a research. The stance of this paper is to uphold the significance of theory in a research. Theory is like a human brain that controls how we observe and think about a particular matter so that it is vital in all research. Even though some people take up an affirmed non-theoretical stance, their way of looking at certain problems in research is still influenced by previous concepts that have been read. Therefore, this paper will encompass the nature and general function of theory as well as the importance of theory in the social sciences and humanities, and more specifically in literary studies.

**Keywords:** theory, research paradigm, social sciences and humanities, literary studies

## Introduction

The question of whether theory is important or not in conducting academic research emerges following some viewpoints that regard theory as something inessential in a research. The popularity of the expression, 'Well, in theory that's ok, but in practice ...' might have become one insignificant factor of theory. To add to the polemic, Robert Merton (cited in Grix, 2004: 101) has argued that "Like so many words that are bandied about, the word theory threatens to become meaningless. Because its referents are so diverse – including everything from minor working hypotheses, through comprehensive but vague and unordered speculations, to

axiomatic systems of thought – use of the word often obscures rather than creates understanding". Furthermore, according to Bryman (cited in Grix, 2004: 101) the dominant understanding of theory and its application in research has been strongly influenced by the positivist research tradition. This tradition has been strongly shaped by the role of theory in the natural sciences<sup>1</sup> in which theory is defined as "possible explanations which can be tested and ... often contain

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<sup>1</sup> Bryman's opinion will be repeatedly mentioned throughout the paper as a comparison with other recent paradigms that determine the role of theory in the social sciences and humanities.

replicable relationships between certain variables (that is, concepts which vary in amount or kind)" (Grix, 2004: 101). In the 'messy' social sciences and humanities, nonetheless, researchers seldom come across "such replicable and reliable 'laws'", since "the study of people, their institutions, their environment and their creative output is a very complex task" (Grix, 2004: 101).

However, Grix (2004: 102) states that, whether we like it or not, "all research is necessarily embedded in some form of theoretical framework". Even though some people take up an affirmed non-theoretical stance, their way of looking at certain problems in research is still influenced by previous concepts that have been read. Grix asserts that "the researchers' ideas will have come from previous research and theories, discussions with peers and supervisors, and 'gut' feelings which all help, at an early stage, to identify general research questions" (2004: 103). Similarly, even if the aim of the research is to create a new theory based on fieldwork or to challenge the flaw of the previous theories, the researchers will have to start by exploring some theories or hypotheses that will either support the upcoming theory that they will create or become the starting points for their proposal. The need to employ a specific theory or various theories in a research project does not simply arise because the research will look more qualified or the researchers can think a difficult substance. The most important thing is how to connect a particular theory or theories with observation to reach empirical evidence in the natural sciences or observable things in humanities/the human sciences. In this case, theory is like the human brain that controls how we observe and think about a particular matter so that it is vital in all research. Therefore, the discussion in this essay will encompass not only the nature and general function of theory but also the importance of theory in the social sciences and humanities, and more specifically in literary studies.

## Nature and general function of theory

It has been well understood that there is no common agreement on the function of theory in research because of the different ontological preliminary goals of researchers. Nonetheless, most academics have the same opinion that some form of framework is essential to support in both selecting and prioritizing certain aspects over others and in revealing relationships between certain concepts at an abstract level.

There are various general – not to mention traditional – definitions or uses of theory in different contexts. Yet, only some definitions will be considered in this essay based on their simple elaboration of the general concept of theory. First, Bouma and Ling (2004: 19) explains that, "A theory is a guess about the way things are, an idea how something works, or what it is like to be something, or what will happen if ..., it may be an idea about what difference will be made by doing or not doing something. Theories are ideas about how things relate to each other." For instance, one of the purposes to carry out certain academic research is to test the notion of theory as an idea of how the world might be. Testing the theories is a way to uncover any evidence or data to maintain a mental picture of the way things are. Thus, Popper (cited in Grix, 2004: 103) defines theory as "... nets cast to catch what we call 'the world': to rationalise, to explain, and to master it. We endeavour to make the mesh ever finer and finer." It would be very tricky to find out which data and facts to collect initially without employing theory as a guide.

The function of theory is plainly expressed by Gery Stoker (cited in Grix, 2004: 103) as follows:

... to select out certain factors as the most important or relevant if one is interested in providing an explanation of an event. Without such a sifting process no effective observation can take place. The observer would be buried under a pile of detail and be unable to weigh the influence of different factors in explaining an event. Theories are

of value precisely because they structure all observations.

Grix (2004: 102) further emphasizes that the very function of theory - structuring the observations - appears to be fundamental, particularly for those who conduct research under time constraints, for instance, students. Since the aim of the theoretical section of a dissertation is to create a systematic empirical part in the natural sciences or observable things in the human sciences, these two aspects need to be associated in order that complex social phenomena can be understood.

Evans and Gruba (2002: 73-75) furthermore propose that there are at least three functions for using theory in research. Firstly, it provides the background information which is essential to frame the scope and importance of the research problem; it sets up the parameter for the research argument. Secondly, it distinguishes and studies previous research conducted by others who deal with similar problems but it is not always vital to deal with these studies in full. It will help the researchers to gain a better understanding of the many issues of the main problem. At this stage, the researchers will develop their ability to think critically by either accepting or refusing the previous arguments or research results doing so confidently. Thirdly, examining theory will show methods that have been employed in the efforts to solve these problems either successfully or otherwise. Engaging in conversation with other academics in conducting a research is very useful. It will then influence the way we see certain problems in a research project.

In short, theory is reasonably functional, for it acts as a tool to be used in dealing with research problems or as a framework in shaping and framing researchers' perspectives. Without theory, or at least some form of classificatory system, it would be extremely difficult to know which data and facts to collect in the first place and then how to organize them.

## **The role of theory in social sciences and humanities**

As has been noted previously, some of those who challenge the importance of theory in research do so because the role of theory in the natural sciences dominates the understanding and application of theory in research. However, this does not mean that theory is seen inessential in the research of social sciences and humanities. In his article 'The Sociological Imagination' (2000: 201-202), C. Wright Mills emphasized the importance of theory as follows:

Good work in social science today is not, and usually cannot be, made up of one clear-cut empirical 'research'. It is, rather, composed a good many studies which at key points anchor general statements about the shape and trend of the subject. So the decision - what are these anchor points? - cannot be made until existing materials are re-worked and general hypothetical statements constructed.

Mills further explains what he meant by 'existing materials' which cover a number of theories related to a research topic, related studies previously undertaken by other researchers as proof that those theories are worthy to be applied, and materials that have been collected but not yet made theoretically applicable. In taking the available theories into account positively or negatively, some ways can be applied. First, the researchers can challenge the idea with supporting fact which will be followed by a detailed analysis if needed. Arranging those theories thoroughly as a range of choices that will classify the problem itself can be another possibility. The third way is by allowing such theories to arise only if we think that they are needed in framing the research focus. In other words, a theory can be used by simply restating what an expert states on particular aspects or the entire concept, by accepting or rejecting some notions of a theory which are followed by reasons and arguments for doing so, or by using the theory as a basis of suggestions for

the sake of elaborations and projects (2000: 202).

In dealing with the word 'theory', it is also important to elaborate research paradigms because different paradigms will determine different roles of theory. First, the positivist paradigm sees theory as a tool to "order, explain, and predict facts" (Danermark et al. as cited in Grix, 2004: 106). As has been mentioned earlier, positivist paradigm tradition is shaped by the role of theory in natural sciences. Second, the critical (realist) paradigm tends to use theory to guide the research, to interpret the facts, and to uncover the deep underlying structures of social reality (Delanty as cited in Grix, 2004: 107) that cannot necessarily be seen but can be identified (Hollis and Smith as cited in Grix, 2004: 107). For critical realists, reality does not present itself as it really is; thus in order to "reveal the structured reality of the world we inhabit, we must cast our gaze beyond the superficial world of appearances, deploying theory as a sensitizing device to reveal the structured reality beneath the surface" (Hay as cited in Grix, 2004: 107). Third, the interpretivist paradigm believes that theory helps us to understand the social world by describing and interpreting how people conduct their daily lives (Neuman as cited in Grix, 2004: 108). Fourth, a post-modernist paradigm is a purely theoretical narrative in its own right. Researchers working in this tradition certainly do not believe in a "predictive" role for theory in research (Crotty as cited in Grix, 2004: 109), although they do suggest that theories (especially influential ones) can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Postmodernists believe that "grand theories" such as Marxism and functionalism are not relevant today (Jones as cited in Grix, 2004: 109). Therefore, there should be no more need to excuse for blaming positivist paradigm and natural sciences as the ones that control the understanding and application of theory in a research.

## **The importance of theory/theories in literary studies**

In the context of the above discussion, literary studies may be classified under a critical (realist) paradigm, an interpretivist paradigm, or a post-modernist paradigm depending on the research problems formulated. For instance, if the text shows a dominant theme of patriarchy, a critical realist might be the most suitable paradigm. It is relatively not easy to identify the causes of patriarchy; however, it is possible to critically examine its effects in society or in a text (Grix, 2004: 107). Moreover, as the role of the researcher in literary studies is to interpret the text, an interpretivist paradigm is useful too. In addition, the emergence of literary works in the field of postmodernism enables literary study to use the postmodernist tradition.

Research on literature deals with text as a primary source of information. Literary works can be seen either internally or externally or both altogether. In other words, the framework can be in the form of literary theories dealing with the literature itself, such as narrative elements that build up the work, or in the form of external theories dealing with subjects outside literature, such as psychoanalysis, sociology, gender, and so on. J.J.A. Mooij (1979: 122-123) argues that literary theories open new ways to examine their subject matter or new perceptions, so that by these, there will be more new findings in analyzing certain works. The use of theory gives the researchers more to see (or read) rather than if they work without theory. The researchers propose approaches to investigate literary works, to focus on particular factors of them, and 'lines of systematically literary research'. In other words, the theory sheds light on certain aspects of literature. For example, aspects of narrative structure that we have never noticed previously are disclosed by a theory of narration. Mooij has commented on the function of literary theories as follows:

Literary theories supply a conceptual framework useful for the description, the analysis and the understanding of literary works. They suggest what is to be looked



for, rather than state what will be found. They provide a conceptual apparatus, claiming, of course, that its application will be enlightening. They may even claim this application to be in conformity with the nature of their subject matter, but without defining in specific detail what this nature amounts to, apart from the applicability of the conceptual apparatus. Briefly, they furnish a certain "possibility" of approaching literary works. (1979: 131)

Having decided on the literary text (s) they will adopt in the research and on possible problems emerging from the text (s), researchers will need to decide the focus of the research which finally leads to the choice of relevant theory or theories, which are not contradictive one another. Donald Keesey, in his book *Context for Criticism* (in Purbani, 2010: 3), asserts that literary analyses can be generally divided into five focuses, namely, relationship between text and author, relationship between text and audience, focus of the text itself, relationship between text and reality, as well as the relationship between text and other texts. The first focus deals with revealing the intention of the author to write a certain literary work. Theories that can be used are expressive realism, historicism, biographical criticism, psychoanalysis of the author, and so forth. The second focus sees the readers as the ones who decide the meaning of the text. Reader response theory and psychoanalysis are some of the theories in this focus. The third focus deals with the autonomy of the text itself by ignoring other aspects outside the text. Researchers can apply new criticism and structuralism to approach the text in this case. The fourth focus believes that a literary work reflects the reality. Yet, post-structuralism theorists observe reality quite differently from those who uphold mimesis. They believe that the text itself has the ability to create reality. Theories that can be employed are sociology of literature, cultural studies, Marxism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, feminism, and so forth (in Purbani, 2010). Fifth, poststructuralist researchers tend to see the text as something

that will never have originality. Every text has analogical relationship with other texts that have the same convention and shows on a degree of inter-textuality. Inter-textual analysis can be used in this focus. The same literary work will have different interpretation and findings if researchers use different analytical tool or perspective (in Purbani, 2010).

Based on the development of literary theories, research on literary work with the use of literary theory or theories is inseparable. Indeed, the term 'literary theory' has been found long ago in the research of Rene Wellek and Austin Warren *Theory of Literature* in 1949. They define literary theory as "the study of principles of literature, its categories, criteria, and the like" (1984: 39). Wellek criticizes the German concept of "*Literaturwissenschaft*" (literary sciences) because he believed that literary theory belongs to the humanities, not to the natural sciences (1984: 553). The dominant tendency in the development of literary theory before the 1960s emphasized the specific aspects of literary texts; for example, literary theory will exist only if research methods are no longer based on non-linguistic actors such as the historical or the aesthetic. In other words, the notion of literary theory tends to be exclusively about literature itself and not any other issues; consequently, all non-linguistic theories and methods are banished from the study of literature. These can be found in Russian Formalism to the Prague School and New Criticism to Structuralism (Xian, 2010: 5).

However, from the late 1960s to early 1970s, French theory, together with post-structuralism and the post-modern paradigm loaded the field of literary studies. This event marked a shift from literary theory to theories and the birth of what Terry Eagleton called 'grand theory' which is different from the literary theory in Wellek's sense. The movements that emerge in the field of politics and social sciences transformed the basic substance of literary theory from outside. The change from modern literary theory to post-

modern literary theory, the transformation from linguistic-based theory to a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary theoretic exploration, or the shift from pure literary theory to the theoretical pursuit of politics, and so on are some of the effects (Xian, 2010: 6). This shift can be traced back to Eagleton's claim (1996: 207) that the universal values proposed by the humanities in Wellek's notion "had too often proclaimed a spurious disinterestedness, preached 'universal' values which were all too socially specific, repressed the material basis of those values, absurdly overrated the importance of 'culture' and fostered a jealously elitist conception of it." This leads to the crisis of the humanities (in which literary theory is one of the branches), as well as the decline of "universal value", a superior culture, or "a false promise of egalitarianism" (Xian, 2010: 7). Eagleton points at this decline as the transition from literary theory to theory (Xian, 2010: 6).

Jonathan Culler (1997: 3-4) represents the veritable revolution as follows:

This simple explanation is an unsatisfactory definition, but it does seem to capture what has happened since the 1960s: writings from outside the field of literary studies have been taken up by people in literary studies because their analyses of language, or mind, or history, or culture, offer new and persuasive accounts of textual and cultural matters. Theory in this sense is not a set of methods for literary study but an unbounded group of writings about everything under the sun, from the most technical problems of academic philosophy to the changing ways in which people have talked about and thought about the body. The genre of 'theory' includes works of anthropology, art, history, film studies, gender studies, linguistics, philosophy, political theory, psychoanalysis, science studies, social and intellectual history, and sociology.

Similarly, Michael P. Clark restates the previous quotation into "[A]nd as literary language lost much of its specificity, the attention of many critics turned from the constitutive power of metaphor, meter,

prosopopoeia, paradox, irony, and other attributes most often identified as distinctly 'literary' to the extra-literary and even extra-discursive forces at work in society at large" (2000: 3). This marks the shift from concept of literary language into non-literary social discourse. Judith Butler, John Guillory & Kendall Thomas, in their preface of *What's Left of Theory* subsequently stated: "Theory has become impure as it engages the social and political world through the reading of literature ..." (2000: x). They further continue:

... it seems, theoretically informed literary analysis that suspends all political judgment fears contamination from another direction: the contamination of theory by politics. If some of those who turn against theory in the name of politics do so by laying claims to referentially and thematic criticism, then some of those who turn against politics in the name of theory do so by sacralising the suspension of all reference to context. Both are projects of purity which do not recognize their fundamental dependence on the other (2000: x).

In other words, the transformation from literary theories to theories is a change from pure academic research to academic politics, since everything in literature is politics including literary practice as well as literary study. Some issues in recent literary studies employ politics-related-terms, such as class, ethnics, nationality, gender, power/knowledge, hegemony, identity, difference, ideology, post-colonialism, and so forth (Xian, 2010: 12).

The above development generates three differences between literary theory and theory. Firstly, the former upholds the belief of human nature and universal value, whilst the latter uproots these and consider them as only "the products of language for social construction". Secondly, literary theory still stresses on the "transcendental value of aesthetics and art", but theory believes that aesthetic and art value are employed to be the function of certain ideology. Thirdly, on the one hand, literary theory regards itself "to be an objective and justified study of literature"; on the other hand, theory maintains that

theoretical politics can be represented in any kind of literary study (Xian, 2010: 13). Post-colonialism, queer theory, cultural studies, feminism, post-modernism, gender studies are some of the theories that have emerged more recently.

### Final Remarks

In conclusion, theory is fundamental to academic research. The traditional understanding and application of theory that was dominated by natural positivistic paradigm in natural sciences can no longer be supported since there are more research paradigms – critical (realist) paradigm, interpretivist paradigm, and post-modernist paradigm – that enable social sciences and humanities to interpret their own perception and relevance of theory in research. Even though some people argue that they adopt a non-theoretical position, their way of seeing certain problems in their research is still shaped by some frameworks derived from previous theories, discussion with their peers, and their ‘gut’ feeling. The importance of theory in Literature as one branch of humanities has been observed in the development of the term ‘literary theory’ that is transformed into ‘theory. The former deals with literary language, such as metaphor, rhythm, irony while the latter concerns with the analysis of social political discourse that is non-literary, such as gender studies, post-colonial studies, cultural studies, and so on. In other words, in dealing with literary works, researchers need either literary theories or theories as the analytical tool.

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